

Memorandum

To: Cape Elizabeth Town Council
From: Michael K. McGovern, Town Manager
Re: Thoughts Regarding Fort Williams Park
Date: October 1, 2016

It was 40 years ago this month on October 25, 1976 that the Cape Elizabeth Town Council voted to dedicate the former Fort Williams into a space that would be “predominantly park.”

The 1976 Policy Statement

Fort Williams Park is a municipally owned park created from the military post that once flourished there. It is a unique community resource that has irreplaceable scenic, natural and historic qualities. The Town of Cape Elizabeth has dedicated it to predominantly park, recreational and cultural uses, which uses preserve or enhance or are otherwise fully compatible with its unique qualities. It exists for the residents of the town and others who may wish to join the enjoyment of this community park.

This policy statement has served the town and the park well for the 40 years. The intent of the policy has been implemented by a citizen advisory committee and by successive town councils. There have been many significant debates over the years regarding the removal of buildings, the creation of new amenities such as the ballfield near Delano Park and the degree to which the park should be supported by taxes or by revenues generated within the park.

There have also been many changes generally seen as positive such as the acquisition of Portland Head Light, the creation of the cliff walk envisioned by Gus Barber and the creation of the Fort Williams Park Foundation.

Today there is renewed murmuring about the direction of the park and its use. This year in particular many have commented regarding growing congestion in the park. Much of this has occurred as we have had a dry summer with little bad weather, the new children’s garden was completed, the cruise ship related bus traffic has stayed strong and one food vendor in particular has helped to extend the length of time vehicles stay in the park.

Recommendations

1. The Fort Williams Park Committee should schedule a public forum to host citizen’s views on the future direction of the park. This should be done outside the context of any specific proposal. There should be specific invitations to the Fort Williams Park Foundation and to the Museum at Portland Head Light.

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2. The park needs more active management than the amount of time that can be devoted to it by the director of public works considering all of his other responsibilities and the growing complexity of the park dealing with policy and operational issues and with extensive public interaction. The new town manager should be asked to consider park staffing options as part of the upcoming budget process.